

Strays, Episode 2: Last of the Winterstorms

by Wild Cat 214

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Summary: Driven from Faded Dreams, the motley band of Hiccup, Cog, and Levi must travel to the Spire of Heaven's Library for the help they seek. But what they find there proves bigger than anything they've faced before. Can they handle the truth? Platonic HiccupxOC.

1. Chapter 1

Cue epic opening song

**Chapter 1: The Maze of Myst**

Author's Notes: Hey, hey, hey! I'm back! This is Wild Cat 214, and you're reading episode 2 of Strays, on .

Okay, enough parodies of Disney Channel.

If you're a new reader to this series, I recommend reading episode 1, **_Lost Homes_****, first. The events of this story might not make much sense if you don't.**

Reviews:

mc arno (Apr. 3, Chapter 10 of Episode 1) â€" Merci beaucoup! Je parle un peu du franÃ§ais, et j'Ã©tais trÃ©s joyeux t'aime mon rÃ©cit (J'espÃ©re mon franÃ§ais Ã©tait bon).

The Story Of Your Life (Apr. 3, Chapter 10 of Episode 1) â€" Tell that something it deserves a cookie, because you're right. No one is going back to Berk anytime soon. As a matter of fact, cookies for everyone! *flings a basket of cookies into the air like confetti*

**I hope you guys have fun with this episode. I know I will

:)**

Disclaimer: HTTYD is not mine.

Key:

0*0*0 â€" scene change

Horizontal line â€" perspective change

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><p>The trip was grueling. Hiccup worried that Toothless wouldn't be able to fly much farther, and from the looks of it, Cog and Levi were in the same boat. How his Seraph managed to fly with those tiny wings on his ankles was a mystery, but after spending a few days in Faded Dreams, he realized it probably had a simple answer. Magic.<p>

When they had flown long enough that a streamer of white rocks arced in the sky over them, Levi and Dhole began spiraling down to what looked like a huge pit in the side of a hill. Even with the pale light from the rocks above, it was impossible to see what that hole was, exactly.

Cog made a noise halfway between a squeak and a groan when they got closer, and Snow looked at her with worry while Ash maneuvered. They touched down right at the edge of the hole, which turned out to be some sort of tunnel leading deep into the ground. Levi dismounted and began walking down the rough stairs along the floor of the tunnel, but the white-haired girl put a hand to his shoulder and stopped him.

"Levi, you cannot be serious about going in there. That's the Maze of Myst," she said, pointing out something that must have been obvious to the two of them. Hiccup got off of Toothless and joined them, folding his arms in front of him curiously.

"The Maze of Myst? What's that?" he asked, glancing between them for the answer. Cog sighed and let go of Levi to lead Hiccup a few feet away, probably to keep Levi from hearing their conversation. Why that was the case, he had no clue.

"The Maze of Myst is a very dangerous place filled with monsters. It's this massive tunnel system, and no one really knows just how deep it goes. Some say it reaches all the way to Eldur, realm of the fire _GuÃ°i_, " she explained quietly, glancing over her shoulder. He nodded and frowned a bit.

"Okay. Why do you need to tell me over here?" he replied softly. The girl groaned quietly and lightly cuffed him.

"Because Levi doesn't know that you're from Berk, and something tells me we should keep it a secret until we know for sure what's going on. Things have been crazy lately. We don't need any more insanity right now," she hissed, switching from her normal pleasant self to the intimidating Cog he had seen earlier that night. Gods, had it really been only a few hours since he had used his Myst Magic, helped her find Snow and Ash, and run away with her and Levi?

"Are you two done? Because we need to see the Librarian of the Spire

of Heaven. She's bound to have something that can help us in those musty tomes of hers," Levi said casually. The two of them eyed him uncertainly. Cog had been reluctant to go into the Maze, and from what she had said, it didn't sound like such a friendly place.

"And, uh, how are we going to get there without being seen?" Hiccup asked nervously. He shrugged in answer.

"The Maze should help with that. We can travel below ground until we find an exit that will get us there," he answered casually, as if this was something Hiccup should have known already.

"Right, but how will we find a way through?" the young Viking clarified. At this, the other man seemed stumped, until they saw Cog crouch down and start pulling things from her bag, the same one she had grabbed just before they left. First came some sort of round thing with a tiny piece of bi-colored metal behind a glass cover, one end red and the other silver, then came a few canteens of water(?), a silvery stand with a pitch black cover on a chain over the top, and, finally, a large roll of paper.

"I can help with that." The teenage girl grinned with delight and took the cover off of the stand, revealing a small anolite crystal that illuminated the area around them, and pushed the paper flat.

"The Maze of Myst is actually a huge structure that lies underneath every part of the Fractured Lands. We can use these passages to travel unseen until we get to the Spire," she replied confidently, running her finger along the paper to a circular spot on the map. The male members of the group stared at her in mild shock, and she blushed.

"What? I paid attention in some classes. I'll have you know that I liked history and geography," she protested. They all looked amongst themselves, then to the dark hole leading into the bowels of the earth.

"I guess it's our best bet. The sun will be rising soon, and Darksoul's soldiers won't hesitate to follow us into the Land of the Rejected if they see us flying during the day," Levi said, glancing toward the lightening sky to the east. They had spent the entire night beginning an adventure, and now they had to continue it by entering a place known as the Maze of Myst. Was it the only way? Most likely. Was it a good idea? Probably not.

That cheerful thought in mind, Hiccup steeled himself for the descent into the Maze, just as Levi and Cog did with their bond animals. With heavy heart and stomach fluttering, the intrepid party began to walk down the steps into the darkness.

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><p>I have to admit, it isn't called the Maze of Myst for nothing. The labyrinthine passages would have boggled the minds of even the best explorers, the sheer number of monsters would have driven away the bravest of warriors, and the constant Myst made it hard to see anything beyond its silvery, iridescent billows. Of course, I felt more powerful, and the Myst helped replenish our supplies whenever Levi used an offensive Magic to help drive away monsters (Dhole

allowed him to summon up a ghostly Seraph, which I'm pretty sure counts as dusk-affinity Magic) or Hiccup made us invisible before we passed by a particularly difficult monster. The various bond animals helped, too, with Toothless' purple fire, Ash's normal fire, and Snow's ice convincing some monsters that it really wasn't worth it to attack us.<p>

We were doing pretty well as we walked through the tunnels, that is, until we came upon what looked like the ancient ruins of some long-forgotten dweorgir temple. It probably was. The dweorgir had been around since long before the Catastrophe, though they had understandably avoided human contact before that period. Back then, the old gods had been a lot more prominent, and their followers had been a lot more prone to fight anything that wasn't human. We were able to see what it was because Toothless blasted the ceiling with a bolt of fire, making the entire room glow.

But it wasn't the temple that was bad. No, it was what lay inside that was bad.

It was really Hiccup's fault. He was the one who saw the treasure chest in a nook and began going towards it. If I hadn't grabbed his arm and pulled him away, we would probably have been short a member of our party, and I doubt Toothless would like losing his partner.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he asked as I led him back to the safety of the group. I glared at the chest, then looked back at him pleadingly.

"Hiccup, if you know what's good for you, you will not go anywhere near that treasure. I don't care if someone says it contains the most valuable thing in the world, you are not to step within a yard of it," I ordered quietly. He jerked his arm free of my grasp and backed away a bit.

"Why? It's just a box," Hiccup said, starting back towards it. Levi let out a sigh of disgust and waved for me to catch him before he got himself killed. I hurried after him, and I managed to stop him from moving right when we heard the humming sound.

"Uh, Cog, what is that noise?" he asked, worry creeping into his voice. All I could do was stare at the treasure chest in horror. It was the source of the faint buzzing, and that meant we were too close.

"Listen to me very carefully. We are going to back away slowly, quietly, and without any sudden movements, okay, Hiccup?" I murmured, gently tugging on his shoulders. He nodded imperceptibly, and we inched our way back to Levi, Dhole, Snow, Ash, and Toothless. With our movement, the buzzing faded away to be replaced with an eerie silence, and we all shared a look.

"We need to get out of this place. Come on, I think I see a tunnel this way," Levi muttered once we were within the safety of our group, motioning us toward another dark hole. Both of us said nothing, preferring instead to heed his advice and flee the area as quickly as we dared. It seemed all was going well for us; at least, until we entered the room of the temple containing the tunnel's mouth.

The hum was louder this time, probably because there were at least twenty of the treasure chests in this room. My gaze darted from one brass-decorated wooden box to the next, dread building up inside until I felt like it would start overflowing from me. This was really not good.

"Whatever you do, no loud noises or sudden movements. They only attack if they think you're scared or a threat," the oldest of our group ordered quietly. Hiccup seemed confused, but who could blame him? I'd have been confused, too, if I didn't know what they were.

But the various gods must have thought it funny to see us swarmed, because, wouldn't you know it, that was when Hiccup kicked a loose chunk of rubble and made it skitter across the hard, stony floor.

The treasure chests began unfolding, the lids lifting up and splitting in half down the middle to become the "antennae" of the heads that leered at us with hungry red eyes. The fronts, sides, and backs split into six parts for each chest, the fronts and backs splitting in half like the lids, to become flat plates of armor on spindly, two-jointed legs that ended in sharp points. Pairs of filmy, veined, transparent wings unfurled from the segmented bodies, and long tails ending with two menacing stingers uncurled from underneath the bellies of the insectoid monsters around us. Slowly, the harmless treasure chests became...

"Oh... my... gods. What... what are those things?" Hiccup stammered, fear drenching his voice to my left. Levi growled with apprehension and readied a sword that had been on his back. He spat on the ground and glared back at the monsters, sword held in front of him in the style usually taught to the royal family of Faded Dreams.

"Mimics," he replied viciously. Hiccup shot me a look of confusion and fear as he grabbed his crossbow, and I pulled my own weapon from its strap on my back. This was not going to be an easy fight.

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Let's get one thing straight. I said it wasn't going to be an easy fight. Boy, was I wrong!

It was the most difficult thing I've ever faced in my entire life.

First of all, you have to understand something. Mimics usually attack by ambush, if they're alone in their territory. Unsuspecting, inexperienced adventurers will approach them, ignoring or not hearing the buzz they make in anticipation of a meal, and when they open the treasure chest, their tail, which is folded up at just the right position, will strike and poison or paralyze their prey. Mimics eat people, it's a well-known fact, which makes it pretty rare for someone to be bonded to them. Strut was the exception, not the rule, in that Stefan, his Mimic partner, preferred to eat the same things humans like. In fact, Stefan was the only reason I knew what a Mimic was and what it looked like in ambush mode. That was why I had tried to get Hiccup away from that lone Mimic, before he was attacked and

eaten before our eyes (or possibly after we could no longer see). I should have known there would be a hive of them here. This was the sort of place adventurers liked to go to, in search of lost treasure of the dweorgir. Perfect hunting ground for Mimics. In these numbers, they acted more like wolves than the solitary insects did.

As of this moment, we were running for our lives through the tunnels. The entire hive of Mimics was on our tails, almost literally (one had tried to take a chunk out of Snow and Ash's tail, only to be lightly roasted and frozen by the offended dragon), and any monsters within a three mile radius had cleared out before they were caught and brought back to the queen Mimic as dinner. This made our lives both easier and harder. Easier because we didn't have any extra distractions. Harder because it meant the Mimics didn't have any extra distractions.

We had just entered a large, very black cave when my friend decided to speak.

"You know, I never thought I'd be running through a cave with two other people, two dragons, and a wolf-thing while being chased by living treasure chests that want to eat me!" Hiccup shouted over the ruckus. Levi smirked, I just gave him a tight grin, and the bond animals we were riding (hey, it was faster than our own feet, and it made getting through the tunnels a lot quicker) made brief noises of amusement. At least someone thought this was funny.

I would have replied with something snarky, but that was when we heard the shriek. It was the scariest thing I've heard, and I've heard ghost stories from Mr. Klaki. Those are freakin' terrifying. This was worse. This was like the cry of a million Banshees amplified through a huge audicite crystal. If you don't know what that is, it's this special mineral that can transmit sound throughout its entire crystal structure, even when pieces are taken away. Now picture the haunting wail of an army of Banshees through a giant one of those. That's the closest I can come to describing the scream from the depths of the Maze.

"OHH, SHIT!" Levi yelled from his roiling position on Dhole's back. Hiccup glanced over at me and probably saw my terrified face, because his soon contorted into one of his own.

"MIMIC QUEEN!" I informed him over the sound of their feet clattering against the cave walls and floor and ceiling behind us. Slowly, somewhat against my will, I turned around to see her. A massive, female Mimic, the Queen is the only one that can produce fertile children out of her whole hive. This one looked like, at one point in her life, she might have been a somewhat large treasure chest. Not anymore. We could see just how big she was as she slowly rose from the gargantuan crevice that had been hidden by the shadows of the cave.

The pieces of her disguise no longer looked like dark wood and yellow metal. Instead, glowing fungus and spots of color had completely overgrown the armor, making her light up the entire chamber with soft blue, green, and yellow. Her red eyes were like giant glass lanterns seeking us out, and when their cruel beams caught us like the searchlights of a prison in the Blasted Lands, they narrowed in anger at the thought of her prey escaping. The Queen was easily the size of an entire wing of the palace in Faded Dreams, and though her wings

could no longer support her, she would have no trouble catching us if we went airborne.

Well, that settled it. We were screwed. Mimics were starting to cut us off, and the Mimic Queen herself had decided to join the hunt instead of letting her minions bring our paralyzed bodies to her. There was no way to escape.

* * *

><p>Author's Notes: DUN DUN DUN!

I'm an awful person to leave it at a cliffhanger, but I can't help it. Big things are coming up. I needed to end the chapter somewhere.

Please review! I like feedback of any kind! No, seriously. Any kind of feedback is welcome.

Wild Cat 214, out! *flies off to escape angry readers*

2. Chapter 2

**Chapter 2: Side Effects**

**Author's Notes: This chapter is going to be mostly Hiccup's point of view, because a lot of important things happen involving him, but I add a little bit in as myself. Just to spice it up.

>

Reviews:

mc arno (Chapter 1, Apr. 10) - Merci!

**The Story Of Your Life (Chapter 1, Apr. 11) - My brother has watched some of the Librarians, so I kinda know what you're talking about. Unfortunately for them, our heroes and heroines must face quite a bit, especially in this chapter ;) **

understandalone (Episode 1, Chapter 10, Apr. 11) - You'll just have to wait and see. And no, Cog won't fall for Levi. But someone else will :P There will be more fluff, just not yet. I have plans within plans, a veritable web of ideas that are linked together, and there will be some fluff tangled up in there. Thanks for liking my stories! I like them, too.

Disclaimer: HTTYD is not mine.

Key:

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Horizontal line â€" perspective change

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><p>Hiccup looked around rapidly, searching, hoping that there might be some way to escape the horde of Mimics. There was nothing. Above

them, they could hear the buzzing of filmy wings. Around them, they could see a sea of red dots stretched out around them, slowly lit up by the Queen's bioluminescence to reveal the undulating insects closing in. The clatter of sharp feet against hard stone and the incessant humming combined into an unpleasant drone that stuck with him.<p>

It seemed the intrepid heroes had already met their doom just hours into their adventure. What kind of a story is that?!

Luckily, that was when life took a turn for the better.

* * *

><p>A quick word from the author..._

It seemed that the sound of the hive and the rise of the Queen had convinced a few of the larger monsters of the caverns to arrive in search of a meal. Mimic camouflage didn't just help them catch human prey. It kept monsters from eating them, thinking they were just another of the strange constructs of the humanoid races. The insects were very tasty to some of the larger creatures, such as Abyss Worms, Crawlers, and the huge flocks of Abysteels that called the Maze of Myst home.

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><p>It was a giant worm that saved them. Tough, dark gray skin speckled with white kept the Mimics from stinging it, and even the Queen began to retreat back into her nest when she saw it.<p>

"What is that?!" Cog shouted hysterically. Levi laughed and patted Dhole's head, and the Seraph started to hover in the air.

"An Abyss Worm! The earth gods must like us!" he replied brightly, just before the Worm turned to look at them with its tiny, milky eyes. Their faces fell when they saw the puny amount of Mimics in its mouth.

"Okay, maybe not..." he amended. The Abyss Worm reared back to take a bite out of them, Snow, Ash, and Toothless jumped into the air "avoiding the hard, chitinous mouth that crashed down " and they flew after the ousted prince with the Worm in pursuit.

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When they flew toward a bright light at the end of one tunnel, Hiccup breathed a sigh of relief. If he had learned anything about worms during the few fishing trips he had gone on with his father, it was that they didn't like the sun. Moments before it could snatch Toothless and Hiccup in its beak, they shot out into what looked like a deep gash in the earth just above a natural bridge of rock that connected the tunnel they had just exited to another on the opposite side. The Worm let out a deep shriek of frustration as it came to a stop just out of reach of the light, then slowly turned its ponderous mass around and went back into the tunnel.

"We made it! Thank the earth gods we found this Chasm Bridge," Levi sighed, flopping back onto the furry monster he was sitting on. Dhole, Snow, Ash, and Toothless all set down on the stone bridge, and

Hiccup got off to take a good look around. Silver fog was pouring down like water from the top, obscuring most of the bottomless canyon they were in, and if he looked down, all he could see was darkness.

"What is this place?" he whispered, in awe of the strange terrain. Cog joined him and put an elbow on his shoulder, pointing at the top.

"This is why this region is called the Fractured Lands. No other part of the world has deep chasms like this but here. The earth gods created them so that Myst could go back into the ground after it's used and be replenished by the gods. The Maze is connected to its various parts by way of these Chasm Bridges, like this one, and that's how we're gonna get to the Spire of Heaven," she explained quietly. The white-haired girl was about to walk away and leave him to his thoughts, but stopped and turned just enough to look him in the eye.

"Don't fall. No one knows how deep these are but the gods themselves," she said gravely. He took a few steps back from the edge and watched her walk up to Levi.

"Hey, prince. Do you think you can scout out where we are on Dhole? Darksoul knows what Hiccup and I ride and look like, but he doesn't know you're with us. You'll be fine... probably," she asked, pointing to the top of the chasm. The young man rolled his eyes, mounted his bond animal, and shot up into the open air.

At the same time, Hiccup felt a stab of pain in his arm and looked at it. The green sleeve had a large slash in it, and the scratch revealed by the hole was red and oozing. Cog heard him and came over, then winced at the sight of the wound.

"Ooo, you were hit, huh? Looks like you got nicked by a Mimic. At least you weren't stung. You wouldn't have been able to move, otherwise," she said, doing her best to not look at the injury as she pulled out some bandages and a tiny pot of some sort of ointment.

"Basic first aid kit. It's just disinfectant, but it'll help keep it from being infected," the girl told him before shoving them into his hands and moving to the other side of the bridge. He stared after her with a mixture of confusion and surprise, then settled down to applying the green gel in the jar and wrapping some of the strips of cloth around the scratch. It wasn't deep, thank the gods, but it still hurt when he worked the gel into the area. If left unattended, it might have turned serious.

When he was done, Hiccup went over and sat beside the white-haired girl, who was busy undoing the clasps on her battered armor and setting the pieces aside.

"Uh, Cog, you okay? You seemed kinda queasy back there," he asked, remembering the green tint to her face when she saw the injury. The girl looked him steadily in the eye, never letting her gaze move, then went back to taking off the armor silently.

"Cog?"

Levi and Dhole returned at that time, and Hiccup told him about Cog's weird behavior. The man chuckled and looked at the teenage girl, asking her if she was afraid of blood. She blushed and shook her head, simply saying that she didn't like seeing injuries because it reminded her of her adoptive father's wounds. They were silent after that admission, but then Levi, to change the subject, told them that they had, against all odds, managed to find the Chasm Bridge that would take them to the Land of the Rejected, where the Spire of Heaven challenged the skies and the Library waited. But it was getting late, and it would be dangerous to travel through the Maze at night. Deadlier monsters came out to play at night in large numbers, worse than the Mimics and the Abyss Worm. The Bridge would be safe, as long as they set up Cog's anolite stands (she had four, saying that she had planned on exploring other lands in search of her bond animal and would have needed plenty of light to ward off monsters) and stayed in the middle of the rock spanning the gap. The creatures of the night hated light " for obvious reasons " and would leave them be while they slept.

"Everyone, get some rest. We've still got a ways to go before we're clear of the Maze. Darksoul's men might be looking for us even now, so we should take shifts. I'll take the first watch. Cog, you'll go after, and Hiccup, you'll be next. When you feel like a few hours have passed, wake the next person up. When your shift is done, Hiccup, wake me up and we'll start it over again. Got it?" Levi said firmly. The two teenagers nodded and laid down next to their dragons. At first, Cog was uncomfortable lying next to Snow and Ash, but the two dragons soon started crooning gently and curled up around her, supporting her body with their wings and tail. Soon enough, the girl was asleep (they could tell because she was breathing slowly and steadily), leaving Levi and Hiccup awake.

"Wow, she's out like a rock, isn't she?" the older man joked before sitting at one end of the set of lights, nodding briefly to the teenage boy as he went. Hiccup chuckled and leaned against Toothless' side, hoping he would get some sleep in this strange place.

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The only way to describe Hiccup's dream was eerie. He was in Berk, and it was like it always had been, the villagers going about their business as usual " except no one seemed to mind the dragons that were also around. Deadly Nadders, Gronckles, Monstrous Nightmares, Hideous Zipplebacks, even Terrible Terrors were everywhere, and some of the Berkians seemed downright pleased to see them. It was so strange, compared to what he had seen of Berk just before leaving.

_"_Hiccup, there you are!" his father's voice rang out from behind him. Startled, he turned, only to see Stoick walking up to him and Toothless. There was something different about himself, though. What was it?_

That was it! His left leg was now a prosthetic! When had that happened? When had all this happened? Why was he here, seeing this?

_"_Hiccup, I need you to take the rest of the Academy out to find that rogue dragon that's been attacking ships. Be careful. All of the

people who return say it's a tricky beast, and that it's not like anything in the Book of Dragons," his father ordered gently. Stoick the Vast, gentle? What sort of crazy world was this? Had the Myst driven him insane?_

Other-him nodded and got onto the other-Toothless, who had a red tail fin with a white skull on it. What was that about? His mind reeled with questions, even as he watched the other-him and other-dragon fly off with what looked like a Nadder, a Gronckle, a Monstrous Nightmare, and a Zippleback... with other riders! Not to mention, those were the dragons from the arena.

'What's going on?' he thought bemusedly.

Before he could see any more, the scene shifted to that of a strange campsite hidden from the sky by boughs woven together into a pavilion, of sorts. A crowd of maybe twenty people was gathered around a bonfire in the center of a group of tents, all in strange gray, red, and black leather armor with Sigils sewn onto the backs. Hanging from their waists were helmets with stylized wings on the side where the ears would have been, but though he couldn't see their faces clearly, he had the strangest feeling he should know them. A young woman came up to him, her face masked by a leather helmet, but she also had some sort of emblem on her shoulder pads that no one else wore. It looked like the symbol emblazoned above strange writing on banners scattered throughout the area, the same wing design as those on the crowd's helmets, but it had a red core instead of black.

_"__Are you ready, Hiccup? This is the final battle. There will be no second chances," she asked affectionately after she hugged him tightly. Her voice was muffled by the leather, but it was very familiar. She reached up to pull off her helmet, and right when he was about to see her face..._

He woke up to the sound of screams.

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"Hiccup! Get up!" Cog shouted desperately, terror lacing her voice like poison in that weird drink Darksoul liked. Wine, was it called? He hadn't liked it very much because of its weird flavor, but the _Jarl_ had seemed to like it. Maybe you just had to acquire a taste for it.

"HICCUP! GET OUT OF THE WAY!" Levi roared, and that did it. Hiccup shot upright, sleep long forgotten, and barely managed to roll away from his resting place to avoid something horrifying. It was like someone had combined a mouse and a centipede into a freaky, giant, two-headed monstrosity. The eight black, angular legs of the arthropod were completely at odds with its furry, gray body, and the compound eyes and sharp mandibles jutting out of what otherwise looked like a giant mouse head were even worse. Two long antennae flicked around on each head, detecting the others who were fighting it and making it send its tail their way. The necks were like the bodies of two centipedes, with red-violet chitin and small black "legs" sticking out of the sides. More plates of this chitin ran down its back to its mousy tail, which was tipped with two stingers like the Mimics. It was, in essence, the fever dream of some crazed god of vermin.

"Toothless!" Hiccup shouted. The Night Fury dashed over and allowed his rider to get on before shooting up into the sky. Now faced with three powerful monsters, the monstrosity seemed to reconsider attacking them and fled deeper into the abyss, leaving them to take a breather and recuperate.

"What... what was that thing?" he asked the others, who seemed just as upset as he did. Levi was panting with overexertion, so Cog filled him in as usual, though she was also winded.

"That, Hiccup, (pant, pant) was a Centouse. I've (gasp) never seen (wheeze) one that big. Usually they only (deep breath) grow to the size of a small rat, but that's in cities. They might grow bigger here because of the Myst," she explained brokenly. He nodded, stood up, and looked around. It was still night, but the sky above had gone from a dark, steely gray to a lighter shade of fog. Morning was coming.

"Think we should pack up and keep going?" he suggested quietly. The others nodded silently, still trying to recover. Hiccup felt bad that he hadn't been much help, but that dream... what had happened to Berk? And who was that woman? She obviously knew him, and he knew her, but he had no clue who she was right now.

As a way to make up his lack of aid during the fight, he chose to gather up the anolite stands and put them in Cog's pack for her, making sure they didn't crush anything important, like the weird round thing Cog called a compass (it was supposed to point north, but the world had been crazy since the Catastrophe, and so it was unreliable half the time) or the map. Definitely shouldn't crush the map.

He noticed that they had all sustained some injuries, and so Hiccup went around applying the disinfectant and bandages for them. Cog adamantly refused to look at any of her injuries until they were covered with the white cloth, so Nuts had to help him find each and every one. She had a few bruises, cuts, and scratches, but nothing was broken or fractured, so she would be all right. Levi was much the same, only he was more cooperative with the teenage boy's efforts. The bond animals had the least amount of wounds, because they were tougher and had scales or, in Dhole's case, fur that was surprisingly resistant to attack, though Nuts had a large gash in his side from a stray attack by the tail. That was bandaged swiftly, and the Claptrap chirped in gratitude and slithered down into the safety of his partner's armor.

Once they had all regained their strength, the seven of them (or was it eight? Did Snow and Ash count as two separate entities, even though they had one body?) set off into the next part of the Maze, praying that they would survive to see the Library.

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><p>A flash of yellow sped by the tunnel entrance and up the canyon. It looked like a tiny hummingbird, only it seemed to be made of pure gold with ruby eyes. It had watched them during the entire battle, transmitting data to its mistress in her citadel.<p>

"_**They are safe. I only hope Deorca wasn't the one who set that

Centouse on them,**_" she murmured worriedly, leaning back in her seat. Golden light surrounded her in the strange room filled with giant bubbles of light. In each one, a different person was shown. One was a girl with short, curly brown hair, blue-gray eyes, and a light blue star tattooed over her right eye. Another was a girl with long, pointed ears, black hair with pink streaks in it, and pale blue eyes. Next to her was a boy who also had long ears and pale blue eyes, but his hair was black with light blue streaks in it. Yet another showed a girl with long, silvery hair pulled back in a ponytail and violet eyes. One glowing sphere near the girl and boy showed a young woman with silver-gray hair, cat ears, and yellow cat eyes. Most of the bubbles had images of young women inside, each with different faces, hair, and eyes, but there was one thing they had in common. Each was a Guardian, one of _her_ Guardians, or was an ally of the Guardians that needed protection.

At the farthest end was a bubble showing a young woman with black hair that faded to white and crimson eyes. Her face changed slightly, and sometimes she had long ears or was replaced by a black and white dragon with red eyes, but it was clearly different versions of the same woman. It was to this that Lucia went, gently placing her hand on the woman's face.

"_**Luna, you know what to do,**_" she whispered softly as it changed to show one version of the woman standing next to the black and white dragon. Luna turned to speak with someone offscreen and revealed her black and white Sigil, showing that this one, at least, was in the Fractured Lands.

"_**Keep Cog safe. Make sure Deorca doesn't destroy her, and Darksoul doesn't kill her. We need our Guardian of Happiness.**_"

* * *

><p>Author's Notes: The Centouse is a creature of my own creation, not based off any monster from a game, movie, book, etc. Can't you tell by how messed-up it is? It is a centipede-mouse hybrid that I came up with in eighth grade during Spanish class, mostly because that was the sort of thing I did back then. I made a lot of hybrids, like the peaket (peacock-cricket), the phoedracorn (phoenix-dragon-unicorn), and the rupoler (ruby-hippo-sunflower. Don't ask. I did it for a friend). Ah, good times.

Yeah, I'm a little on the weird side, in case you couldn't tell. But that's what makes me fun!

As always, please review! I like it when people leave comments. It makes me happy :)

Wild Cat 214, out!

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3: The "Curse" of the Library

**Author's Notes: **

Reviews:

mc arno (Apr. 16, Chapter 2) â€" Merci! Les gardiens sont trÃ©s important, et leur histoire sera racontÃ©e bientÃ´t. Juste pas encore.

The Story Of Your Life (Apr. 17, Chapter 2) â€" Oh, yes, it's foreshadowing... for around episode 14 or 15 :P I'm willing to bet you're right on one of those counts. Eh-heh :3

Disclaimer: HTTYD is not mine.

Key:

0*0*0 â€" scene change

Horizontal line â€" perspective change

* * *

><p>I'm not gonna go into much detail over what happened in the next part of the Maze. Suffice it to say, I will never see fluffy bunnies the same ever again.<p>

There really are no words to describe how happy we were to stumble out of the accursed depths of the Maze of Myst. Every bone in my body ached, Hiccup seemed to have gotten thinner â€" if that was possible â€" and even Levi seemed gaunter. And that's not mentioning the state of the various bond animals. Toothless seemed perfectly happy to spend the rest of his life outside of the Maze, Snow and Ash were quietly grumbling and sending poisonous glares at the tunnel we emerged from, Dhole growled deep in his throat whenever someone said the word "skeleton," and Nuts was just curled up in a pocket of my apron, trying to get some much-needed sleep.

The sun was past its zenith as we slowly clambered out of the dark caverns, and I let out a deep sigh of relief.

"I am never going in there again, not even if you paid me," I swore emphatically. The others nodded, and, as if in a trance, we all turned to see our target. The Spire of Heaven loomed over us, a tall, narrow peak of stone that housed the largest library anywhere. Some said it was cursed, that no one ever left it, and yet that begged the question of how they knew it was cursed. Maybe no one wanted to leave. Yeah, that must have been it. No one wanted to go.

"Well, we're nearly there. The Librarian should be able to help. She's supposed to be the wisest being in all the Fractured Lands, and some say, the world," Levi replied, doing his best to cheer us up. Hiccup and I shared a look, then turned our gazes back to the Spire. Even now, in the light of late afternoon, it had a fascinating quality to it that made one feel tiny and insignificant in the face of so much history and knowledge.

"Let's go, then. I'd rather not be captured by Darksoul now, after all we've been through," Hiccup said wearily. We all nodded and started the long walk to the Library.

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The door of the Library was set at ground level, right in the base of the peak, and it was made of solid bronze and steel. Whatever else,

it was clear that the books in the Library were valuable enough to warrant such defense. The two Gargoyles flanking the imposing entrance helped with that impression. I went up to one and gently scratched behind its ear, murmuring gentle words that told it we were no harm, and then joined the others. Hiccup gave me a funny look when he saw me with the Gargoyle, but I ignored it. Even living statues need some lovin' every so often.

Levi lifted the heavy brass knocker and banged it against the metal door several times, then stepped back and waited. My feet were killing me, and I was just about ready to break down the door myself when it swung open to the inside just a crack. One eye peered out at us from the musty darkness sealed within, the piercing blue staring right into my soul.

"Who dares entreat admission to the Library of the Spire of Heaven?" the voice of a grouchy old woman said with surprising strength from the crack. I glanced between Hiccup and Levi, and they looked at each other, and finally I decided to speak.

"If you are the Librarian, we wish to use the Library for knowledge and aid in our mission," I explained formally, bowing slightly. The old woman grunted with jaded amusement.

"I haven't had any visitors in a long time. What's your mission?" she asked grumpily. Levi chose to talk this time.

"We have come regarding Xavier Darksoul. I am Levi, and these are my friends, Hiccup and Cog," he said firmly, not letting any nervousness he might be feeling show. At the mention of our names, the eye I could see narrowed, and she was silent.

"...Very well. Come in. I'll tell Teresa to prepare some food and tea for the guests," the old woman said at last. The doors swung open to reveal a handsome, elderly lady in formal blue and gold robes, her silver hair pulled back in a severe bun and a pair of thick spectacles perched on her nose. She was the epitome of the ancient librarian, except for the fierce, attentive gleam in her eyes.

"My name is Lola Goldweave. Welcome to the Library," she greeted us, allowing me, Hiccup, Levi, Toothless, Nuts, Snow and Ash, and Dhole entrance to the Spire of Heaven.

0*0*0

If I had to choose one word to describe Lola, it's resilient. She may look like she's pushing seventy, but the old lady moves like a woman a quarter of that age. She would have to, if she were to get up and down those stairs so quickly. Of course, if it weren't for the steam lift that awaited us on the tenth landing, I doubt we would have been able to climb the entire Spire that day. Or that week. Still, that's ten floors' worth of steps up, and I know I'm not the only one who was glad we got to the elevator when we did. Even Dhole looked like he was getting tired, and he's a Seraph. They're renowned throughout the world as being full of stamina.

The trip up wasn't very exciting, but I was able to answer a few of Hiccup's questions involving the Library. It's an ancient structure built not long after the Catastrophe, made inside the hollowed-out Spire of Heaven, and later, near the top, built outside as well.

Inside reside copies or originals of basically every book, scroll, pamphlet, stone tablet, and magazine in the world. If you want to know exactly who was the _Jarl_ of the Land of the Abandoned during the war between Faded Dreams and Forgotten Wishes, or the names of the old gods before the Catastrophe, or even the best recipe for making spiced mead for a party, this is the place to go.

This was where we would find out more about who I was, what it meant to be a Skellurdreki, and where Berk was. Okay, that last part was a fairly recent addition to my list of knowledge-to-be-learned, but I just knew I had heard the name Berk somewhere before, and I wanted to pin it down before I completely lost it. I never forget the name of a place that easily. It was one of the reasons why I had excelled at geography, and why I knew exactly how to avoid guards in Faded Dreams. That, and my sense of direction is nearly impeccable. As long as I'm aboveground, in a place that doesn't make me feel claustrophobic. I'm not even afraid of tight places, normally, but the Maze could have made me if I had stayed there any longer.

"We're here," Lola announced, breaking into my thoughts as the lift began slowing down and my ears begged to be popped. I yawned, doing my best to ease the ache in my poor ears, and looked around with awe at the scene revealed.

Shelves and shelves of things stretched on around us, curving to match the circular shape of the Spire. In a glass display case near us, a few interesting swords were set up on small racks, the blades curving up at the tips. Probably weapons from the Submerged Lands. The warriors of that marshy collection of nations used swords like that. I had read about it once, when I was really bored.

"Well, it certainly doesn't look cursed," Hiccup remarked once the initial shock wore off. Lola snorted and started walking toward the center, where a red dragon with ivy-like antennae, fan-shaped wings, and a pointed, silver-tinged snout with two large horns was waiting near a steam-powered stove. It growled curiously when it saw us, and when I noticed the red crystal on the bottom of Lola's Sigil, I guessed this was Teresa. The two Gargoyles downstairs must have also been bonded to her, going by the two gray crystals on the backs of her hands. They were minor bond marks, but she was still connected to them.

"Nonsense. The Library has never been cursed. That's just some hogwash that idiot Darksoul has come up with to keep people away. Tea?" she replied, holding up a small tin of what must have been tea leaves from the Land of the Sorrowful. I nodded gratefully, as did Hiccup and Levi. Water was all fine and dandy, but spending several hours in a twisting labyrinth full of monsters required something a bit stronger.

We all sat down on the chairs and couch that awaited us in the middle of the Library, and watched curiously as she and the dragon started preparing the tea. Hiccup nudged me with his elbow and indicated the dragon.

"I've never seen a dragon like that. What is it?" he asked interestedly. I racked my brain to remember.

"I think Teresa's a Changewing. They can shift the color of their scales to blend in with their background, and they usually hunt in

packs, like wolves. They spit acid, too," I explained, looking at the dragon in question. She seemed a bit more friendly than what I had heard of her species, but maybe that was just because they hadn't had much company.

"So, what brings the true ruler of the Land of the Faded, a boy riding a dragon not seen in years, and one of the last members of the Winterstorm family to the Library?" Lola finally asked, after the tea was ready and she handed it out. I nearly choked on my drink, but Hiccup helped me with not dying as we looked at her in shock.

"W-what?" my friend asked warily. It seems this old woman was sharper than she seemed. But what had she meant by that?

"Um, there must be some mistake. I'm not a real Winterstorm," I said, thinking she might not be all there. The old woman chuckled humorlessly.

"Please. I know the signs of the Winterstorm family. That hair, those eyes, and the fact that you seem to be bonded to a certain Skellurdreki that went into crystal stasis one hundred and fifty years ago? You, my dear, are Cog Winterstorm, daughter of Gear Winterstorm and Arrow Winterstorm-Pearllood. I know all about how you came to be in this time." Everyone looked at me in surprise. Shock had me rooted to my seat, trying to make sense of this. I really was a Winterstorm? I was the lost daughter of the most notorious couple in that era?

"How I came to be in this time?" I echoed breathlessly. This was way too much for my head.

"Yes. You... and your sister," she replied cryptically.

* * *

><p>Author's Notes: *Cue sound of glass breaking*

Yeah, you weren't expecting that, were you? Well, maybe you were. I did kinda hint at it in the last episode, and with the title of this one. But you probably didn't think she had a sister!

You're probably wondering how she came to be in this time, and I'll tell you right now, the method will be revealed later. Until then, you'll just have to wait and see.

Anyways, please review! I love feedback of any sort, and I will cherish every word you give me, even the not-so-kind ones. They will forever be ensconced in my heart.

Wild Cat 214, out!

End
file.